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## SHOULD PAPERS DEALING WITH MATTERS OF SCHOLARSHIP, OR PAPERS ON METHOD, BE THE CHIEF FEATURE OF TEACHERS' MEETINGS<sup>1</sup>

FROM the statement of the question proposed for discussion it is clear that the alternatives presented are not intended to be mutually exclusive. We are not asked to consider whether teachers' meetings should be devoted entirely to papers on method or entirely to papers concerned with matters of scholarship. It is assumed that one class of papers ought to be more prominent than the other, and the question is: Which class? At present our meetings of schoolmen are, for the most part, taken up with the discussion of methods of teaching, a good measure of attention being paid also to the problems that arise in the rearranging of courses to meet the rapidly changing conditions. The Classical Conference at Ann Arbor was probably the first gathering attended by a large number of teachers in high schools and academies, which broke with the tradition. Of the thirty-three speakers announced on the programme, twenty-four treated subjects in the domain of classical scholarship; and it was noticeable that the contributions of the latter were listened to with not less interest than those of the speakers who discussed pedagogical themes. But the question is not one that can be settled by what a geologist would call surface indications; it involves a consideration of the essential character and purpose of the teacher's work, and of the teacher's individual advantage. If the instruction of youth in the period in which the so-called secondary education comes has more the characteristics of a trade than of a profession, then gatherings of schoolmen, as of iron-

<sup>1</sup> A discussion before the Foreign Language Section of the Chicago and Cook County Teachers' Association, November 14, 1895. These remarks have reference throughout to the work of the high school or preparatory teacher. By "teachers' meetings" are meant not "faculty meetings," but gatherings of teachers from different schools.

moulders, may well concern themselves with the discussion of ways and appliances for turning out the largest product of good quality most expeditiously and at lowest average cost ; if the teacher's work is properly professional, the subject must be approached from an altogether different point of view. Further, if the quality of instruction loses rather than gains as a teacher becomes skillful in the mechanical sense, that is as he acquires a routine akin to that of the skilled laborer, it is clear that the well-being of the schoolman deserves the most careful consideration, that every influence may be made to contribute to the largest possible individual efficiency.

It is to be regretted that in the minds of the great mass of the people, the *status* of the teacher is still a matter of much uncertainty. No better evidence of this need be brought forward than the wide and indiscriminate application of the title "Professor." A Chicago paper recently announced that in a group of four counties there were 478 men who insisted on the use of this title ; the list included : "teachers of music, school-masters" (note the order) "two sleight-of-hand men, one ventriloquist, four sluggers or 'professors of sparring,' nine dancing-masters, two oyster-openers, and twelve drink-mixers or bartenders;" and I cannot forget the feeling of astonishment which took possession of me when, on my first visit to Boston, I was confronted with the far from inconspicuous sign, "Professor James Martin, Bootblack!" Now and then the teacher is put on the level of an ordinary workman by the day or month, who can be turned off, and another "put on the job," at the whim of some one in authority. Unfortunately this low and commercial view of our calling has been shared in times past even by some superintendents ; but it is gradually giving place to a more enlightened conception, and in time will pass away entirely.

I do not see how, on second thought, any one can regard our work as other than professional, and can fail to give to the profession of teaching a rank second only to that of the ministry. What is teaching? "It is," as some one has pointedly said, "the bringing of knowledge into due relation with the mind."

The office of a teacher is a mediatorship. The lawyer is a mediator between the individual life and the formulated judgments of society concerning conduct and established usages in regard to property. The physician is a mediator between the human system and those agencies and causes that tend to destroy it. The clergyman is a mediator between the life that is and the life that is to come. And the teacher is a mediator—between what things? On the one side is knowledge—what we know of this wonderful world, with its forces all too imperfectly understood, with its boundless variety of type and form, and what we know of man, the highest thought of God, not merely as a physical or intellectual or moral being, but as a creature whose development has been recorded in stages of civilization and written out in history. On the other side is an immortal soul, that must stand in some relation, for good or evil, to the rest of mankind. If the teacher is a mediator between knowledge and the mind, can the function of any member of human society be higher?

While the character of its mediatorship lends to teaching a dignity that alone would entitle it to a place among the professions, there are several minor considerations, one or two of which may be noticed here. Broadly speaking, a profession differs from a trade in that it requires learned preparation rather than the acquirement merely of manual or mental dexterity. Whatever the present shortcomings of American teachers in point of preparation for their work, both the ideals and the standards of attainment are slowly but surely rising, and not a year passes without improvement in what we may call the professional equipment. Further, the work of the teacher involves an assumption of superiority. His position is one to which the pupil, then the pupil's parents, and finally society in general, naturally look up; the presumption is that he is teaching because he knows more than the great majority, and that the respect of the community belongs to him by right. The fact that some teachers fail to recognize their true standing, while a few have recognized it only to abuse its opportunities, and the fact that some communi-

ties are more backward than others in giving to the teacher his due, do not militate against the truth of the matter as stated.

Finally, teaching is a profession because the processes, under normal conditions, can never become stereotyped, but involve infinite readjustment to new conditions. As the lawyer and the doctor have cases involving every variety of principle and of detail, as increasing alertness, the rapid assimilation of facts previously unknown, and the readiness to meet every emergency are for them the price of success, so the teacher must keep himself abreast of that which he teaches, and at the same time adjust himself to every mind brought under his instruction; he will never find two classes, never two pupils, alike, and he should not teach the same subject in precisely the same way in two successive years. A great many teachers, finding the routine way of doing their work the easiest, readily fall into it; from the day that this happens their professional value begins to lessen. He who has at heart the best interests of the profession can but deplore the fictitious value often attached by Boards of Education to years of service, and the wide currency of the common fallacy that it is a good thing for students, before they complete their studies, to teach a year or two "for the sake of the experience." Suppose that we should say to the student of medicine, who is half-way through his course, "Better go out and practice a couple of years; the experience is what you need, and you will appreciate the rest of your course so much the more." Very well for the medical student, but what of the patients whose suffering bodies are to be cut and dosed and practiced on? Well for the student-teacher, but what of the young minds and lives that his callow fingers try to train and fashion? Let the teachers themselves, the principals and superintendents, discountenance the work of the amateur in our schools, shutting out those who wish to teach a while merely as a stepping-stone to something else, or because they do not know what else to do, and admit to positions only those who have the preparation and the ability to adorn their calling, and we shall soon hear no more complaints about lack of appreciation manifested toward the profession. It

is not existence that adds to a teacher's value, it is intelligent experience, begotten of an earnest attempt at all times to come nearer to a high ideal of knowledge as well as of didactic efficiency.

The professional success of the teacher, estimated in the same way that the success of the physician or the lawyer is commonly rated, will depend upon three things: Scholarship, skill, and professional enthusiasm. Scholarship, for a teacher of language, comprises four elements: accuracy, breadth, a spirit of investigation, and literary appreciation. It seems hardly necessary to justify this division, yet a few words of explanation may not be out of place.

Accuracy, it has often been said, is the soul of scholarship. It is the manifestation of truth in detail, and what is not accurate is not true; inaccuracy in teaching is a form of dishonesty. On the other hand, grasp, outlook, the ability to see the general as well as the particular, is no less essential. The man called "a walking encyclopædia" in most cases is not a scholarly man; his knowledge is rarely coördinated and assimilated, rarely so brought into system that it can be utilized, turned, like the machine guns of an ironclad, in any direction on a moment's notice.

But the spirit of investigation is not less important, for it is this which reaches out after fresh knowledge, which continually gathers and sifts new data, which is ever testing unfamiliar conclusions in every possible way; it has in view not merely greater mastery of detail, but also the constant widening of the field of vision. Without it there is no progress; without progress in knowledge there will inevitably come a decline of interest and of efficiency. The spirit of investigation is the salvation of teachers. It is the salt that keeps them fresh and young and earnest, intellectually attractive and strong. A teacher in whom it has died out is on the high road to ossification, no, to fossilization, such as that which gladdens the heart of the palæontologist. Good intentions never yet saved a teacher; we have all heard of the broad highway that is paved with material of this sort.

The fourth element in the scholarship of a teacher of language is literary appreciation ; that is a feeling for the content and form of a literary masterpiece. In Germany there are many, in America a few, who exalt the letter not equally with the spirit, but so far above it that the spirit of literature is lost in the minutiae of philological erudition. Highly as we may value the training that is acquired through the study of language, the word after all has no significance except as the instrument of thought ; and the masterpieces of classical literature were saved from the wreck of the ancient civilizations, not that they might be made drill-books, but because they expressed in appropriate form something that appealed to the mind and heart of men in all times. As literature is the medium in which, and through which, the teacher of language works, he is unfitted for his task if he have not a true and abiding appreciation of it as literature. We can have only a feeling of pity for the teacher of German who is not thrilled at every re-reading of the *Lied von der Glocke*, or stirred to the inmost depths by the gloomy problems and tragic progress of the Faust ; for the teacher of French who is not charmed by the rapid movement and exquisite finish of French prose ; for the teacher of Greek who is not uplifted by the unworldly grandeur of the Prometheus, or moved beyond expression by the pathos and sweet devotion of the Alcestis ; only pity for the teacher of Latin who is not awed by the sublime daring of Lucretius, kindled with fresh enthusiasm each time that he runs over the flowing numbers of Virgil, and quickened in his intellectual life by the deep historical significance, the epic movement and graphic power of Cæsar's Gallic War.

But skill, as well as scholarship, is essential to the teacher's success. In the definition quoted a few moments ago, teaching is stated to be the bringing of knowledge *into due relation* with the mind. The conditions of the process are easily discerned, for there are but three elements : a pupil, a teacher, and something to be taught. While it is an exaggeration to say that the teacher, as the poet, is born, not made, it is true that a teacher cannot be made successful by the application of rules, by the

mastery of somebody's "method," or even by the study of pedagogy. A knowledge of the principles of psychology in their application to the processes of instruction, as well as a familiarity with the history of education and with the development of one's specialty, will be helpful; but in the last resort the professional skill of the teacher, as that of the doctor and the lawyer, is individual in a peculiar sense, because acquired as the result of an unceasing effort at adjustment of individual attainments and of a particular temperament, to ever-varying conditions; it is something that belongs to him individually, and cannot be imitated or imparted, except in a very limited degree, to others. Many have tried to adopt the methods of great teachers only to experience the fate of the pygmies, who with mighty effort lifted the club of Hercules only to have it fall on them. Every teacher, making himself fairly familiar with a few principles of pedagogy that are of universal application, should try to teach in the way in which he finds the readiest adjustment of his own temperament to the natures of his pupils. The main requisite here is good common-sense; if the teacher lack this, he ought to retire into his closet three times every day and pray that it may be given him, for without it a large measure of success is unattainable.

The third element of success is enthusiasm. Without this the teacher's work is dull, and, being in a large measure unprofitable to the pupil, defeats the very end of instruction. No matter what the subject, it can and should be made interesting; and a teacher cannot arouse the interest of his class unless he is interested himself. When I witness a lifeless recitation, my first impulse is to give the teacher a violent shaking; for he is wasting public money, cheating his students, and is himself well on in the ways of professional decline. Various excuses are wont to be offered; but in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred a teacher's work is lifeless simply because he does not know his subject.

Of the three elements, scholarship, skill and enthusiasm, which is the most fundamental? We can have no hesitation in answering that scholarship is; for it underlies and conditions both the others. There can be no skill in imparting without a



mastery of that which is to be imparted ; and "the enthusiasm of knowledge," to quote a terse sentence of Professor Hinsdale's, "is a prime requisite of good teaching." No matter by what path one enters, language, history, art, mathematics, natural science, the further one goes the greater and grander the new vistas of truth that open up and lure the traveler on ; and the mind, broadening and filling with larger conceptions of the majesty of natural laws and the operation of physical and spiritual forces, is lifted up to ever higher levels of thought and experience. It is a privilege to teach, to arouse in others something of that same desire for fuller knowledge which the true teacher will always feel ; whether more an investigator or an instructor, he will be an enthusiast both for higher learning and for his divinely appointed calling.

In view of these considerations, we may safely undertake to answer the question proposed. If the first requisite of professional success is scholarship, then the work of preparation for teaching, and the gatherings of teachers as professional men, should lay more stress upon the promotion of scholarship than upon anything else. When teachers go out from the university into the various towns they miss at once the inspiration of association with those interested in the same things ; often in cities of considerable size, there are not more than two or three teachers of language, for example, who share the same high ideals of work, and these ordinarily find themselves cut off from the use of an adequate library. It is not unfair to say that up to the present time the majority of teachers have succumbed to the conditions of isolation and have made little progress in their studies after leaving the university, to the great detriment of our secondary instruction. On the other hand an increasing recognition of the transitional character of our present system of elementary and intermediate education has caused more than ordinary attention to be paid to the pedagogical side of the work. From the fact that, in the last analysis, pedagogical skill is so largely an individual matter, every teacher after a time develops a method of teaching peculiar to himself. Whether his circle of pedagogical

ideas be broad or narrow, good or bad, he rarely goes outside of it, and he is, and should be, ready on occasion to set forth the results of his experience for the enlightenment of others. But whether converts are made or not, in associations where the body of teachers undergoes little change from year to year, the man who has formulated his own theory of work when called on can hardly avoid saying the same things over; more than one series of teachers' meetings has become a dreary round of repetitions, "the same brethren," as people sometimes say of a prayer-meeting, "always a-harping on the same strings."

Papers on pedagogical subjects should by no means be excluded. In the majority of instances they may profitably form at least one-fourth of the programme; but the large proportion of papers should deal with matters of scholarship, whether in the way of offering the results of original investigation, or a critical examination of the work of others, or a review of the recent literature of one's specialty. The reading of technical papers implies a special audience; the matter may be easily enough arranged, for the larger associations of schoolmen, by having a general session for pedagogical discussions and special or departmental sessions for papers in the different fields of scholarship.

It requires no great amount of prevision to assure one's self that the imminent changes in the organization and work of our high schools and academies will make new demands upon the teacher. As the range of work in several of the secondary studies is increased by the lengthening of the course, more will be required in the way of scholarly preparation on the part of those who give instruction. But leaving the future out of consideration, it is reasonable to assume that the individual development of a member of a profession whose work is with the materials of learning, may best be promoted by furnishing him an incentive to make continual progress in the branch of knowledge which he professes. In view of the relative isolation in which the high school teacher is placed, no better way of furnishing such an incentive can be devised than by providing a sympathetic audi-

ence to listen to that which he may bring forward as a contribution to the knowledge of all. It is idle to say that high school teachers are too busy to make contributions to scholarship; in the best schools the hours of work are not excessive, and generally a well equipped teacher will find the control of his work more and more thrown into his own hands. They who come to a meeting of teachers fired with new interest in some aspects of a subject, inspire at the same time that they inform the rest; and so all go back to their class rooms with new ideas. Thus the tone of instruction is raised, and the teacher, as the gray hairs come, does not grow weary with the burden of a calling which carries him ever forward to greater heights of knowledge, power and influence.

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